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Developing training for pioneer ministry in the Church of Scotland: Reflections on grounding pedagogy and lessons in practice from abroad

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1. Introduction

A report to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland of 2019 by the present writer sought to ‘kick-start’ the absent energy required to initiate a shift in mindset and culture within the denomination as to mission and ecclesiology. The desire was to encourage a significant investment of human and financial resources in the enabling, resourcing and sustaining of ‘pioneer ministry’ and ‘church planting’ in order to form ‘new worshipping communities’, or ‘fresh expressions of church’.¹ The report did so by recommending practical pathways by which all Christians, lay or ordained, might be more fully enabled to express the Gospel in their own contexts, beyond institutional structures. Having been passed by the General Assembly as part of the strategy of the Joint Emerging Churches Group, the next challenge is of one of implementation. This raises issues not only of

structural re-alignment within the church and the release of resources, but also the formation and delivery of avenues of training and support for ‘pioneers’ as new initiatives take shape. This article forms part of an ongoing process of envisioning the pedagogy and shape of such training, if it is to achieve a dynamic purpose of formation and resonate with those who might engage.

The central assertion of the report to the General Assembly was that ‘the building of momentum in the creation of new worshipping communities is the most pressing missional concern in the Church of Scotland of our witness to the Gospel in our time.’² This is a recognition that would seem startlingly obvious in the eco-systems of other mainstream denominations in the United Kingdom, Western Europe, North America and Australasia, many of whom have long since arrived at a series of stark self-appraisals over the past two decades. They have publicly acknowledged the continued failure of inherited models of church to engage a post-Christendom culture in their societies with the Gospel, and from there the potential of ‘fresh expressions of church’ to do so. Those realisations have prompted a radical re-alignment of their ecclesiologies to allocate primary space and resources for pioneering in seeking to express the *missio Dei* through the vanguard of the Church.³

By way of contrast, the present structures in the Church of Scotland remain resolutely definitive and normative, and the argument of the central future importance of an organic, contextual realisation of new forms of worshipping communities in every parish in Scotland is still met at the core of the church with general bemusement and apathy, or at most an acknowledged delegation to specialists and distant sub-committees. As the present writer stated in the 2019 report, “‘Fresh expressions of church’ remain ‘a ‘sideshow’ amongst concerns that appear more pressing, particularly as human and financial resources decline.”⁴

If there is hope for the continued existence of the denomination beyond the next two decades, given the unwavering continuance of a linear decline thus far, it must lie in the Gospel coming alive once more in communities, networks and contexts where it has fallen silent (with the so-called ‘un-churched’ and ‘de-churched’), and where the

present institutional structures of church have little or no hope of any resonance, such that new worshipping communities of whatever form, but – crucially – appropriate to their context, might arise and flourish.

Lay and ordained ‘pioneering’ is a means towards the goal of the rising up of ‘new worshipping communities’. The purposes of a re-alignment towards a culture of ‘pioneering’ are not, primarily, to save a dying model of institution from collapse and extinction. They are to encourage a ‘mixed economy’ of concurrent and confluent streams of ‘new’ and ‘old’ churches which might enhance the other with a blending of experimentation and tradition. Three central purposes might be noted: to enable an encounter with the Gospel outwith the present church; to release and empower those within the church who feel a strong sense of calling to do so; and to create a mutually enriching culture of innovation and experimentation where the joy of the Gospel is communicated.⁵

Who are or will be the ‘pioneers’ that will instigate this, and who may need to engage in forms of training to do so? ‘Pioneers’ are lay or ordained Christians who sense a calling from God to form credible new Christian communities that are appropriate to their context, whether that be geographical, social or within a network. They tend to be initiators and innovators. Jonny Baker uses a memorable description of ‘the gift of not fitting in.’⁶ They might express even innately what Michael Moynagh describes as a ‘pioneering mindset’, which is ‘experimental, step by step and pragmatic’, being ‘based on what you’ve got’, to a greater extent than an ‘organizational mindset’, which would be ‘systematic’, relying on closely-formed plans to achieve goals based on strategy.⁷ At their core for each ‘pioneer’ will lie gifts of entrepreneurship and missional leadership, and key personality traits including resilience, all particular to the individual.⁸

It is assumed for present purposes, following the practice of most denominations in the Western world where pioneering and church planting has received significant investment, that in Moynagh’s words, ‘lay and ordained pioneers of new communities will benefit from four types of support’: ‘an introductory course in the theology and practice of witnessing communities’; ‘being networked into learning communities’ of their peers; ‘coaching or mentoring’, not so that such

communities can be reproduced to a conformed model, but to set free their contextual uniqueness; and ‘connection to the wider church’, be it to a local parish, regional or national grouping.⁹

The 2019 report to the General Assembly thus recommended training and support with the following key components, beyond financial:

- Mentor and Networks – each ‘Church of Scotland Pioneer Initiative’ to work with a suitable ‘mentor’ and be brought into regional and national networks of other Initiatives.
- Training: Nature, Mode and Providers – appropriate training to be provided to all leaders of Church of Scotland Pioneer Initiatives, whether lay or ordained; and to all lay members, elders and ministers in the Church of Scotland, or from other denominations, who wish to explore the possibility of beginning an Initiative. Training provided on a regular basis informally and regionally, integrated with reflective practice and predominantly practitioner-led.
- Training: Routes of Delivery – active partnerships of existing academic providers and Presbyteries for the provision of training for pioneering and church planting.
- Training: Candidates for Ministries – all candidates for all ministries to have training in pioneer ministry and church planting, and in entrepreneurial leadership, both in academic and practical settings, through courses, conferences and training placements, to be funded by the Church. Ministries Council to prioritise the allocation of candidates in training for all ministries to undertake training placements with accredited supervisors with experience of pioneering, church planting or innovation.¹⁰

Whilst acknowledging the central importance in a formative, developmental process of learning of networking, coaching and broader church engagement, and that all aspects are in a strong sense ‘theological education’, this article focuses upon such education as it is implied in the last three bullet points, i.e. a more formalised,

academic input. The article seeks to contribute to the broader task of answering a series of questions in two key areas that result, being the underlying theory and purpose of such theological education, and the practicalities that flow in terms of content and delivery.

Firstly, at the level of underlying pedagogy, what is the place of such theological education in the future training and support of lay and ordained pioneer ministers in Scotland? How can theological education reflect the *missio Dei*? How can it develop and enhance the pre-existing gifts of intending pioneers in entrepreneurship, innovation, and missional leadership, and develop key personality traits such as discernment and resilience? Can such mindsets or inherently practical outcomes be ‘taught’ or ‘trained’? In short, how can we conceive of a role for theological education in the training and support of ‘pioneer ministers’ so that it (a) does not stifle innovation through an over-burdening of content under traditional models of teaching and learning, and yet (b) provides a theological grounding and the practical tools required for the journey ahead with ‘formation’ at its core, rather than the mere acquisition of knowledge?

Secondly, at a practical level of content for courses and subject areas, if momentum does gather nationally in Scotland, what should such ‘training’ within theological education look like on the ground? What core themes, modules, courses, degrees, or accreditation are required? What modes of delivery are appropriate, and by whom? How can lay people with no background in higher education, or in the study of theology, be integrated within and excited by inductive and formative modes of learning? How can that also complement learning processes appropriate to ordained clergy who arrive with divinity degrees and years of parish experience, and whose assumed knowledge and set practices may require some denuding as well as embellishment?

Whilst the answers to these two key sets of questions inform a much larger project of re-consideration and re-balancing of theological education in Scotland, which impacts across and beyond traditional denominations and mainstream academic providers, this article is a contribution which seeks to develop the conversation in two ways. Firstly, it reflects on selected recent streams in the consideration of

the place of theological education in enabling missional vocation; and, secondly, it introduces three examples of the directions taken by denominations abroad which bear a similarity to the Church of Scotland in historical tradition and recent trajectories of decline. From such theory and *praxis*, indications are given in conclusion which serve as way markers for potential further development of pioneer training.

Two important caveats must be expressed in relation to the practice of pioneer training before we embark on this exploration. Firstly, the most fruitful developments in pioneer training have occurred in England, through such as the Church Mission Society, Oxford and Ridley Hall, Cambridge. The result of such training in the lay and ordained, including the Church of England's Ordained Pioneer Minister stream, have formed a significant contributor to the awakening of the Church of England that has led to widespread engagement amongst dioceses in 'pioneering' and 'fresh expressions of church'. This is the primary port of call when considering other jurisdictions, and materials are suggested to do so.¹¹ This article instead is consciously looking to introduce examples from other jurisdictions where developments in pioneer training are more recent than in England and may be at a fledgling stage, envisaging that it may inform the beginnings of more widespread pioneer training in Scotland too, and also where the intended coverage is national.

Secondly, it would be disingenuous to suggest that pioneer training in Scotland begins from a *tabula rasa*. Instead it must be built on a strong tradition of innovation within the denominations in the parish setting; the influence of a succession of institutional reports and partnerships over the past few decades; the sterling efforts of those working within the central institution to initiate momentum; the missional energy outwith the mainstream denominations of charismatic evangelical church plants such as with Destiny and Central, Edinburgh; and, in particular, the work of those who have already initiated and delivered pioneer training 'from the margins' without institutional support or national coverage, such as with Forge Scotland through Alan McWilliam, the Cairn Network, John and Olive Drane, prior courses in Mission-shaped Ministry and the Scottish School of

Christian Mission, and present courses at some academic institutions including the Scottish Baptist College, the Scottish Episcopal Institute and New College, Edinburgh. That work needs to be celebrated and its vision and content incorporated into further developments.



2. Pedagogy – what is the place of theological education in the future training and support of lay and ordained pioneers in Scotland?

Recent scholarly investigation of the connections between theological education and the training of intended lay and ordained church workers has focused upon a key ‘litmus test’ for the former of a dynamic outcome for the latter in the enablement of their expression of ‘missional vocation’, often linked to a re-alignment with the contextual and inculturated witness to the Gospel under the *missio Dei*. In other words, the primary question is asked of the extent to which theological education in its structure, content and modes of delivery enables the people of God to exercise the mission of God in the world. The traditional academic theological programme for the training of ordained ministry in Scotland has focused on development ‘cognitively’, whereas such new appreciations emphasise the centrality too of impact ‘affectively’ and ‘behaviourally’.

In Darrell Guder’s article from 2009 entitled “Integrating Theological Formation for Apostolic Vocation”,¹² he argued that:

It is apostolic vocation that defines Christian purpose. [...] The test of missional theological formation must necessarily be the faithfulness of the lay apostolate when the church is scattered in the world.

For such witnessing communities to be faithful to their vocation, they require missional formation. [...] The challenge before the theologians and seminaries who serve the church by teaching and equipping their future servant leaders is to discover how such theological formation for apostolic vocation is to be done today. It can only happen as the theological disciplines re-conceive themselves in terms of the missional

vocation of the church and of each Christian person. It can only happen as the servant scholars of the church recognize that their disciplines are not ends in themselves but instruments for formation, for equipping, for that transformation that happens by the renewing of the mind. [...] Missional vocation is [...] the divinely appointed center around which [...] all our theological disciplines are to be integrated.¹³

This strikes at the heart of the task for theological educators in the context of ‘pioneering’, such that: (1) the purpose of ‘training’ pioneers is for theological formation to enable and enhance their (often pre-existing) apostolic vocation, and not an end in itself (affecting both lay and ordained, in a personalised manner and not ‘one-size-fits-all’); (2) all pioneer training must be strongly integrated in praxis; (3) to be faithful to the calling, training needs to be directed towards ‘missional formation’; and (4) there is a need to re-conceive all of the traditional subjects (even missiology!), in what is taught, how, where, by whom and to whom, in terms of the missional vocation of each person and the church.

This needs a vital and lived integration in ‘training’, so that a pioneer can think theologically in terms of missiological practice, and practise mission in terms of theological meaning.

Those key tasks of ‘missional formation’ to serve ‘apostolic vocation’ are re-iterated in a widespread empirical study amongst a broad reach of denominations in England which reported in 2018, which embraced similar challenges and concepts when examining ‘the health and sustainability of theological education for ministry’.¹⁴

The intention of the study was to ‘gather, share and interrogate specific practices of teaching and learning that, in the practitioners’ experience, brought about deep and lasting impact on learners.’¹⁵ The authors’ conclusion is that ‘the idea that theological learning ought to be transformational lies at the heart of any notion of formation’.¹⁶ Therefore, ‘at the heart of transformative practice in the church’ is the development by its leaders of ‘theological imagination’ that ‘integrates knowledge and skill, moral integrity and religious commitment in the roles, relationships and responsibilities’ of ministry and mission.¹⁷

Such development was envisaged by the authors to occur within ‘five meta level threshold concepts’ for such theological education to form aspirational ‘dispositions’:

- (i) it should ‘involve character as well as knowledge and skills’ – personal and spiritual formation, discipline and life example
- (ii) ‘the world is the locus of theology – not just the classroom’
- (iii) it is ‘deeply contextual’ and experiential
- (iv) it changes the way we feel, which impacts understanding
- (v) it is relational, grounded in relationships with God, ourselves and others.¹⁸

Theological education in this context thus has an inherently missional purpose, as the people of God engage in developmental and transformative formation, whose purpose is to enhance and enliven their vocation to further the mission of God in the world and the coming of the kingdom.

How can this be conceived as a matter of the relationship of theological education to more familiar missiological concepts such as the *missio Dei*, so as to inform curriculum design and delivery? The intense interaction of theological education with the *missio Dei* was a focus amongst many for the renowned South African mission theologian David Bosch, in his magisterial work *Transforming Mission*. Bosch wrote that:

We are in need of a missiological agenda for theology, rather than just a theological agenda for mission; for theology, rightly understood, has no reason to exist other than critically to accompany the *missio Dei*. So mission should be the “theme of all theology”¹⁹

In turn, this leads J. R. Rozko to conclude that ‘there is no such thing as doing theology for theology’s sake – it is not an end in itself, but has a mission-oriented telos.’²⁰

This identification would produce on the level of course curriculum not only the re-consideration in conception and teaching of traditional

disciplines through a missional lens, such as the adoption of an intentional missional hermeneutic in the reading of Scripture,²¹ but through theological education in Rozko's words, 'not merely our ideas, but our very lives are brought into greater conformity with the missionary nature and purpose of God.'²² This entails the recognition of encounter in the world with the mission of God historically and in the present, and thus 'the faithful practice of mission-shaped theology takes place "on the way," always with a humble recognition of our own situatedness'.²³ The concepts of integration with practice in the cross-cultural translation of the Gospel, and of 'contextualisation' and of 'indigenisation/inculturation' of missional and faith expressions become key.²⁴

'Theological education for missional vocation' must always therefore remain focused on purpose and not only assessed outcome in its transformational and practical missional elements, which in turn creates potential areas of friction for the teaching of mission theology within secular university and college institutions.²⁵

If Scotland is ever to achieve such a revolutionary upturning of theological education for missional purposes in the service of the *missio Dei*, all elements would necessarily be subject to review and re-casting: including the form, content, assessment, delivery and purpose of the academic curriculum; its integration with *praxis* in placement learning; the input of peer networking and coaching; the mode of the classroom delivery; and the identification of those who might be adequately skilled to deliver.

As to the design and practicalities of a curriculum, such an imaginary of a renewed 'missional-ecclesial foundation as the integrative basis for theological education' has been at the heart of the work of a broad range of advocates over the past two decades, within key works such as those of Robert Banks (1999) and Perry Shaw (2014).²⁶ The principles from Shaw's work inform strong derivations for pioneer training in the Scottish context. Shaw argues that the questions 'What?' and 'How?' are 'not in fact the beginning but the end of curriculum planning.' Instead, the overriding factor is one of purpose for theological education, driven by the questions 'why exactly do we exist, and what are we trying to accomplish anyway?'²⁷

Shaw would agree that the purpose of theological education is ‘to prepare men and women who are capable of guiding the church to be effective in fulfilling [the *missio Dei*].’²⁸ Therefore he argues that the answers to eight preparatory questions play essential roles in aligning education as transformational for missional purposes that are appropriate to the students and context, before the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of curriculum are even considered, namely:²⁹

1. What is the ideal church in our context? (exercising the *missio Dei*, empowerment of all believers)
2. What are the contextual challenges? (in society and the denomination)
3. What might an ideal Christian leader look like? (considering 1 and 2 above, what kind of character traits, skills and knowledge are needed?)
4. Who are the learners? (in social, educational and religious terms)
5. Where do the students go? (what will their contexts be when they leave?)
6. When? The time frame (how does it relate to content and focus in order to serve the goals?)
7. Where? The learning environment (how does the physical environment aid or impede the desired mode of learning?)
8. Who will facilitate the learning? (capacity and appropriate skills, not necessarily academic)



3. Practice – Case studies from the Netherlands, Germany and Aotearoa New Zealand

In each of the three case studies there will be a description of the denominational context; the response in terms of commitment to pioneering and innovation towards new worshipping communities, and the forms of training now offered to potential or current pioneers.

(a) *Protestantse Kerk in Nederland* (Protestant Church in the Netherlands, or ‘PKN’)

The PKN was formed in 2004 as a union of the Dutch Reformed Church with other Reformed and Lutheran denominations and is the second largest Christian denomination in the Netherlands. In 2017, it had 1.8 million members, a decline of 22% in a decade. Recognising its increasing divorce from a strongly secularising Dutch society which had become increasingly disparate through individualisation, digitisation and globalisation, and its own structural entrenchment, in 2012 the PKN initiated a significant re-routing of energy and resources into the formation of ‘pioneering places’.

As a consequence, the PKN re-directed its notion of ‘church planting’ from a ‘classical model’ which it had developed in the preceding years that sought to employ individual clergy to replicate pre-existing structures and forms and times of worship in identified geographical areas. The focus shifted to creative forms of new worshipping communities informed by context, led in teams including a propensity of lay people, operating on smaller budgets, with a focus on local initiative and community integration.³⁰

Ten essential elements of new ‘pioneering places’ are envisaged in order to gain the practical and financial support of the PKN, focused on faith, missional purpose in discipleship and service, leadership and accountability. The developmental process for the formation of these new worshipping communities is reflective of Moynagh and Peabody’s circular diagram, which starts at ‘listening’, moves through ‘loving and serving’, ‘building community’, ‘exploring discipleship’ and ‘church taking shape’, before returning to the start at ‘listening’.³¹

Accepting a journey to maturity of around ten years, about 87 new ‘pioneer places’ have begun across the denomination since 2013, with 27 others currently in preparation (around 14 have stopped). Around ten thousand people are involved in ‘pioneering places’, with approximately half of them having no previous church involvement.³² The majority of those involved are under the age of 40.³³

As well as a significant investment in support staff within the PKN to encourage, support and develop the ‘pioneer places’, and the

provision of lower-level monetary resources, the training and support of the leaders of ‘pioneer places’ has become an intrinsic element. Once the ‘pioneering place’ has begun, it immediately becomes part of a ‘pioneering learning community’.

The ‘learning community’ encompasses all modes of support and individuals that input into each ‘pioneering place’, ensuring that there is a sharing and receiving of knowledge and experience both within and between teams. It includes the following key components:³⁴

- Initial listening day – for those considering pioneering, a day of listening to God, the team, the context and the church (a key initial focus as below in Germany and New Zealand at the earliest stage)
- Two-day pioneer training which takes place twice per year – a meeting of teams from around the country, with structured training related to the eight core themes (see below) and open training depending on needs raised by the teams, plus opportunity for socialising and networking
- Online learning platform³⁵ – in-depth resources through articles and videos on the core themes, with interactive working and a deepening of the topics raised at training days
- A pioneering coach – at a local level to help form a vision, build a team, seek support in the local congregation and be involved in substantial development of the project
- Pioneers’ pastor – to focus on issues of personal faith and spirituality
- Niche networks of ‘pioneer places’ who resemble each other in the nature of the groups, contexts or approach
- Closed Facebook group for pioneers

The model related which provides dedicated theological or practical input from the centre is therefore a mixture of structured training and personalised subjective training depending on need, delivered in a ‘blended’ mode of online and ‘in person’.

A learning pathway over time is attached to eight ‘core themes’ of training for pioneering, which are:³⁶

- Listening – ‘the basic attitude’
- Mission and Team Culture
- Loving and Serving
- Network Development
- Exploring the Faith
- Discover What It Means to Be Church
- Strengthen and Sustain
- Sharing Leadership
- The Bigger Entity – relationships with the broader church

(b) Germany

Since 2017 the YMCA University of Applied Sciences in Kassel, Germany has hosted a training course in pioneering lasting one year and eight months entitled ‘Further Education for Pioneers in Church, Mission, Society’.³⁷ Twenty-seven pioneers have begun training in each year that the course has started thus far. The course brings together the focus of the YMCA University in training youth workers with that of the University of Greifswald who train ministers (both of these groups form the bulk of students), and runs in partnership with the Fresh X Network Germany and the Wertestarter Foundation.

The course is ecumenical in outlook and covers the whole of Germany, given its ‘blended mode’ of learning. The course is delivered through three week-long and two weekend intensives, along with significant online elements in between, and is combined with local coaching and mentoring. Students are expected to be forming and developing a fresh expression of church during the duration of the course.

With an initial focus on listening to God, to context and to others, a key component is dialogue and the building of relationships. The mode of delivery of the course is consciously ‘inductive’, looking to initiate processes of ‘self-learning’, to identify what the pioneers need and how they can be supported, and so that they might empower themselves and learn from each other. At the intensives, there is a high level of student involvement within a creative environment, using arts and interactive games.

The course is directed towards the development of each pioneer in three sets of required competences for the missional and contextual formation of a church; namely professional, personal and social. The overall purpose of the course is to develop formation in the pioneers in these competences through five key areas:

- (i) Mindset/Attitude – skills in listening, thinking ‘outside the box’, experimenting and exploring
- (ii) Networking – a sharing of ideas and resources between pioneers and with church leaders
- (iii) Skill training – long term training, but also specific training on topics e.g. missiology, ecclesiology, entrepreneurship; encouraging contextual self-recognition of absence and weakness which leads to collaboration and delegation
- (iv) Coaching – specific project coaching with an experienced pioneer, and small ‘huddles’ with other pioneers in the same field
- (v) Lobbying – speaking up for pioneers, being on their side and encouraging ‘failure-friendliness’

(c) The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

The Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership (KCML) in Dunedin trains all ordinands for ministry in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and engages in lay training within the denomination. Under the leadership of Steve Taylor and Mark Johnston, in recent years they have dramatically upturned the nature, content and delivery of training for Christian ministry and leadership, both for ordinands in training, clergy and members of the church. This has been driven by an underlying focus on the flourishing of missional imagination and the integration of theological reflection with contextual *praxis*, centred upon intensive field-based learning.

Transferring these insights to the broader church environment in order to inspire ‘New Mission Seedling’ projects amongst communities, KCML employs the concept of ‘unbounded learning’ in each person’s context, in order to develop local ‘communities of

practice'. The learning is 'just in time', i.e. each person receives training incrementally when they need it, for what they need, as part of 'action learning'.

At its heart, KCML are seeking to help local communities engage in the *missio Dei* by courses and online webinars that initiate a local group process of learning and development. The goal is that this leads to contextual mission work that may self-generate through forms of pioneering. The coursework involves three sequential stages, developed by Mark Johnston:

- (a) The starting point for anyone considering missional action, which may lead to the later development of a 'New Mission Seedling', is a local series of four facilitated meetings entitled 'Listening in the Neighbourhood'. Through observation, dialogue, practical fieldwork and biblical reflection upon the context, the local group seeks to discern answers to three central questions: 'What's going on in our local neighbourhoods of the community?'; 'What's going on that we have not noticed before?'; and 'What's God beginning to show us as we notice what's going on?' This develops 'mission attentiveness in a church' and encourages the group 'to initiate action-learning activity' in mission in their community.
- (b) 'Mission Action Experimenting' – the next step following a 'listening process' is a project through which a group in a church will initiate an experiment in 'small mission innovation' in their local neighbourhood. They do so through a process of 'discerning, designing and implementing' that might 'lead to deeper participation in and discovery of God's mission.'³⁸ Step 1 of 'Discerning and Designing' takes place over five facilitated group meetings during a period of three to six months; Step 2 is implementation; followed by a final meeting to review and plan ahead, finishing in review and discussion as to what happens next.

- (c) ‘The Lighthouse’ – for those who seek that next step of development, or who have begun a ‘New Mission Seedling’, there is a ‘Mission Innovators Weekend’ that seeks to discern collectively the answer in each context to the question: ‘How can the transforming Christ be known in places and amongst those our current churches no longer engage?’



4. Conclusions

The following reflections are offered on the basis of the examples of theory and practice set out above, as indicators which might inform a continuing conversation as to the nature of forms of pioneer training in Scotland which might be national in their scope and ecumenical in their delivery and student base.

(a) Pedagogy

Missional formation is at the heart of theological education, and is tested by the faithfulness that results from the exercise in the world of the apostolic vocation of both laity and clergy in witness to the Gospel. Training will thus seek to be transformational to serve missional formation and fulfil apostolic vocation. It will focus on ‘who we become, not what we can do’.

The challenge is to resolve how the content, mode and delivery of teaching material can perform as instruments of transformation and equipping of the people of God, so as to bring about a deep and lasting impact in ‘theological imagination’. To do so they must engage character, world, context, experience, deep emotion and relationships – centred not only in ideas but in lives.

For pioneering, this re-focus will recognise the purpose in the formation and transformation of the pioneer, in terms of the presence or potential of gifts of listening, team building and leading, discipleship and discipling, missional entrepreneurship, ability at conflict resolution, resilience etc. – in other words the theological and creative mindset, practical skills and ‘personality traits’ that might be appropriate for the challenges of pioneering, tailored as much as possible to the individual.³⁹

Training will always be ‘on the way’, thus engaging with key notions such as ‘contextualisation’, cross-cultural translation and ‘indigenisation’ of Gospel and mission in its relationship with culture.

As it is aligned with the *missio Dei*, a re-thinking of the form and assessment of academic theological education is required, with the integration of *praxis*, networking and coaching. The key is to identify beforehand purpose and outcome, not merely content, recognising the new worshipping communities that pioneers are seeking to form, in their context, with which people in a team, and amongst whom.

(b) Practice

As for practical implementation, a key starting point is listening: to God, context, pioneer team and the broader church, and recognising God’s agency in the exercise of the *missio Dei*. A relational and dialogical approach to team building and missional output is central thereafter.

The mode of training is, as much as possible, also local and relational, utilising small groups, coaching/mentoring, online platforms, the formation of peer networks for self-learning, and the use of social media. The use of a ‘blended model’ of weekday/ weekend intensives together with integrated online provision will be essential to deliver national coverage.

The focus of training is upon formational development, in turn increasing skills and knowledge to enable action in loving and serving, and in discipleship, leadership, theological understanding of church and mission, and in relationship to the broader church. Processes of reflective practice are central.

As for delivery, its focus is inductive, allowing for self and peer ‘action learning’, and utilising creative means so that the environment of learning might mirror the intended outcomes.

As a core recognition, which unites both avenues explored above, are forms of integration in theological education for pioneering whereby, in Guder’s words, ‘Missional theology seeks to think the faith in terms of its practice, and to practice the faith in terms of its meaning and purpose.’⁴⁰

Notes

- ¹ Sandy Forsyth, *Inspiring New Worshipping Communities: Pathways for Pioneer Ministry and Church Planting in the Church of Scotland*, in *Reports to the General Assembly 2019* <https://ga.churchofscotland.org.uk/publications/blue-book>, at pp. 379–421 (PDF).
- ² Ibid., 380.
- ³ The realisation of the *missio Dei*, that God’s mission has a church and not that God’s church has a mission, upturns all ideas of both.
- ⁴ Forsyth, *Inspiring New Worshipping Communities*, 379.
- ⁵ Ibid., 403–08.
- ⁶ Jonny Baker and Cathy Ross, eds., *The Pioneer Gift: Explorations in Mission* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2014), 1.
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- ⁸ See, for example, Stefan Paas and Marry Schoemaker, “Crisis and Resilience Among Church Planters in Europe”, *Mission Studies* 35 (2018): 366–88.
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- ¹³ Ibid., 72.
- ¹⁴ Eeva John, Naomi Nixon and Nick Shepherd, “Life-changing Learning for Christian Discipleship and Ministry: A Practical Exploration”, *Practical Theology* 11 (2018): 300–14.
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- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 302, quoting C. R. Foster et al., eds., *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and the Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 13.
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- ¹⁹ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 494.
- ²⁰ J. R. Rozko, “Toward a Mission-shaped Vision of Theological Formation: Implications of the *missio Dei* for Theological Education” (paper presented at the American Society of Missiology Annual Conference, Techny Towers, Ill., 15–17 June 2012), 7. https://www.academia.edu/4148062/Toward_a_Mission-Shaped_Vision_of_Theological_Formation_Implications_of_the_Missio_Dei_for_Theological_Education
- ²¹ For recent developments in the consideration of missional Scriptural hermeneutics, see for example the work of Richard Bauckham and Christopher Wright.
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- ³⁰ PKN (2017), 4.
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